

# **REPORT**

## ***Planning and Development***

**To:** New Westminster Design Panel      **Date:** March 25, 2025

**From:** Rupinder Basi,  
Deputy Director, Planning      **File:** #2672717

**Item #:** 2025-98

**Subject:** Massey Theatre Upgrades - 735 Eighth Avenue

---

### **RECOMMENDATION**

*THAT the New Westminster Design Panel review the design submission and provide comments for staff consideration.*

---

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide information to the New Westminster Design Panel (NWDP) in regards to the proposed upgrades to the Massey Theatre and to receive comments from the Panel, with special consideration given to items noted in the Design Considerations section of this report.

### **POLICY AND REGULATIONS**

#### *Official Community Plan Land Use Designation*

The subject site is designated (P) Major Institutional in the Official Community Plan (OCP). This designation applies to areas used for large scale institutional uses such as schools and hospitals. The designation also supports ancillary commercial and residential uses. The subject site operated as part of the New Westminster Secondary School site before the ownership of the Theatre was transferred to the City. In the future, the OCP designation for the site may be changed to align with the theatre use, but for now, the theatre will continue to operate and the proposed upgrades are to allow for the continued operation of the building.

*Development Permit Area*

The subject property is not located within a Development Permit Area, hence, no Development Permit is required for this project. This is consistent with other Institutional designated and zoned sites within the city. However, given the importance of the Massey Theatre as a major cultural institution within the city, staff are undertaking a design review, with input from the New Westminster Design Panel.

*Zoning*

The subject site is zoned Public and Institutional Districts (Medium Rise) (P-2). The intent of this zone is to allow institutional uses at a medium density scale (floor space ratio of 1.0). The proposed upgrades are being considered

*Transit Oriented Development Area*

The subject site is not located within a Transit Oriented Development Area.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Site Characteristics and Context**

The subject site is located at the northeast corner of Eighth Avenue and Eighth Street, is approximately 17,499.79 sq. m. (188,365.99 sq.ft.). The site is relatively flat and currently contains surface parking areas, the Massey Theatre building and landscaping/trees.

The site is located in the Moody Park neighbourhood, directly south of the New Westminster Secondary School and memorial park. To the east of the site is the Moody Park Arena. To the west (opposite Eighth Street) are residential properties that are designated RT Infill Residential Townhouse with multi-unit residential properties to the south, which are designated RH Residential High-Rise in the OCP. The site is located diagonally opposite Moody Park, which is at the southwest corner of Eighth Avenue and Eighth Street.



Figure 1: Site Context Map with 735 Eighth Avenue in Blue

## Building History

Originally part of the New Westminster Secondary School, when the Secondary School (built in 1949) was demolished in 2023, the Massey Theatre Society was separated from the school during the demolition process and remains as a stand-alone functioning arts centre with Theatre events planned and managed by the Massey Theatre Society.

The City acquired the stand-alone Massey Theatre in [2021](#) and since that time plans have been underway to upgrade the theatre to: upgrade barrier free access, upgrade energy efficiency, and address ongoing facility viability to improve the building's overall condition.

While functional upgrades have been the key project drivers, this also presents an opportunity to improve the overall appearance and character of the building; a building that is well loved by the community in New Westminster, and a destination arts centre with a theatre that attracts visitors from the region. Massey Theatre's capacity of 1,260 seats makes it the largest proscenium theatre in the region outside of Vancouver.

From the [Massey Theatre website](#):

*"The Massey Theatre was designed and built in 1948 by E. Evans and Son and W.M. Bow Associate Architects of Vancouver. In its original form, the building had a strong modern identity indicative of post war optimism. "Modernism," as an architectural form, was realized in Canada tentatively in the 1930s and only became firmly entrenched in the 1950s coincident with the post war economic boom.*

*The original streamlined interior plasterwork of parallel lines and curved planes is intact and retains a geometric elegance. “Cosmetic” changes, however, have introduced a monochromatic color scheme and the original grand glass entry tower has been covered over. Additions such as the 8th Avenue band rooms have resulted in the loss of the theatre’s initial modern clarity”.*

The image below shows the original glass entry that has been covered up.



Figure 2. Image of Massey Theatre, in its current condition.

## Proposal

The City is undertaking upgrades to both the exterior and interior of the Massey Theatre. The focus of the review from the panel is on the exterior upgrades which include:

- re-introducing a glass entry tower, reminiscent of the original 1948 design (see photo on the following page),
- upgrading the colour scheme to move away from the current monochromatic colour by:
  - selecting a colour palette with high contrast and complementary but distinct tones, to provide greater visual distinction between building elements to help accentuate the strong lines and clear forms of the massing while also providing the façade with a fresh and contemporary look, and
  - introducing ‘pops’ of colour at strategic locations near the building entrances to enhance the entry way expressions, improve the overall visual expression of the building/add an element of play to façade and support intuitive wayfinding at the site.
- re-introducing the round feature windows facing Eighth Street that have since been filled in (See Figure 2,3,4) to enhance the overall character of the building and reference its original expression.





Figure 3 (top): Image of Massey Theatre c. 1949. Source: City of New Westminster Archives  
Figure 4 (below) and Figure 5 (next page): Rendering of Massey Theatre after the current renovations from Design Panel Package. 'Pops' of colour are proposed to activate the entry expressions..





Other proposed upgrades to the building include:

- improved ramp access to areas of the building.
- accessible washrooms and a performers lift to the backstage
- addition of an elevator between floors,
- site wide upgrades improving access at all three entrances, incorporating space left vacant by the demolition of the gym, and integrating with ongoing work by the school board on adjacent memorial park; note: the site improvements are still being designed.

The applicant's design rationale and project drawings are included as Attachment 1.

### Project Statistics

The size of the building is decreased as the gymnasium attached to the theatre has been demolished.



*Figure 6. Red in the image above shows the Gymnasium portion of the building that has been demolished through this project.*

	<b>Permitted / Required Under P-2 Zoning</b>
Site Area	17,499.79 sq.m. (188,365.99 sq.ft.)
Site Coverage	Existing Coverage - 27 % Proposed Coverage – 18%
Density FSR	Existing 1.0 Proposed FSR – 0.38
Building Height	The height of a building shall not exceed 4 storeys
Building Setbacks	Apart from the gymnasium portion of the building being demolished, there are no other proposed changes to the existing setbacks of the Massey Theatre
Off-Street Parking Theatre Total	Existing: 340 on site shared between CoNWSS & Moody Arena
Accessible Parking	Under review through project
Off-street Loading	Under review through project
Bicycle Parking Long-term Short-term	Under review through project

## **Access and Parking**

The primary access for the Massey Theatre is off of Eighth Avenue. The proposed upgrades would not change the access arrangements or the parking lot configuration. Vehicle and cyclist access would remain approximately as currently existing. A total of 340 parking spaces currently exist on the site, which includes a number of accessible parking spaces. Long-term bicycle storage is currently not contemplated by the facility. Short-term bicycle parking spaces could be provided as part of the site improvement scope, which is currently under design.

## **DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS**

An overview of the design changes and rationale by the project architect is included in Attachment 1. Staff would appreciate comments from the NWDP on the proposed upgrades, specifically pertaining to the re-introduction of the glass entry tower, exterior colour scheme changes and the round windows facing Eighth Avenue that would be re-opened (currently filled in).

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: Applicant's Architectural and Landscape Submission Package

## **APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:  
Rupinder Basi, Deputy Director, Planning

This report was reviewed and approved by:  
Demian Rueter, Manager, Development Planning